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ABSTRACT

Proposals currently being debated for a reform of the examination system at 18+ in England and Wales, and comments on the proposals, are presented to aid in future planning of language courses in Northern Ireland. The context in which the new proposals arose is briefly examined. The following three standard course proposals are diagrammed for comparison: Cambridge Local Examination, Midhurst Grammar School, and Associated Examining Board. All three studies envisage much wider reading, including texts other than literary (especially Midhurst and Associated Examining Board). All explore methods of testing at present in experimental use in one board or another (e.g., multiple choice questions, techniques for examining listening comprehension). The three proposals also involve very heavy teaching and private study programs, in particular on reading. Comments are made on the following skill areas: listening comprehension, written comprehension, oral skill, written production, and reading. Each of the three proposals and a fourth one for beginners' German N level proposed by Dr. Harding are discussed. (SW)

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PROPOSALS FOR A NEW EXAMINATION STRUCTURE IN ENGLAND AND WALES : A PROGRESS REPORT

ED185805

This paper attempted to present in succinct form the proposals currently being debated for a reform of the examination system at 18+ in England and Wales, together with some comments on those proposals. Since the debate is wide open at the time of writing, and is not expected to reach any firm conclusion until the middle of 1979, what follows must inevitably be made up more of questions than of answers. An outline of development elsewhere may, however, be of some use to the future planning of language courses in Northern Ireland.

The problems faced by syllabus planners in England and Wales are different from those of Northern Ireland. A brief preliminary exposition of the context in which the new proposals arose may be helpful.

1. *The problem:* In the last twenty years or so modern language teaching methods have gone through more than one revolution. Many of us, brought up on grammar/translation methods, have been drawn to explore the very different techniques of audio-visual teaching programmes, with their emphasis on communication, and on speaking rather than writing. Things are now in the process of changing again, with greater stress being laid in many places on the receptive skills of reading and aural comprehension than on the productive skills of speaking and writing.

   This methodological revolution is demanding enough on its own. But the changes have coincided in England and Wales with the introduction of comprehensive schools on a massive scale. Table I illustrates the changing shift in school population. In 1958 at age fourteen (larger circle) the majority of children were in Secondary Modern schools, and about $^1/_6$ in grammar schools. Those who remained in school after sixteen (top circle) were, for the majority, in grammar schools. By 1973 the comprehensives had nearly half the children aged fourteen, and also nearly half of those aged sixteen as well, while the grammar school section had shrunk to only ¼ of the senior pupils.

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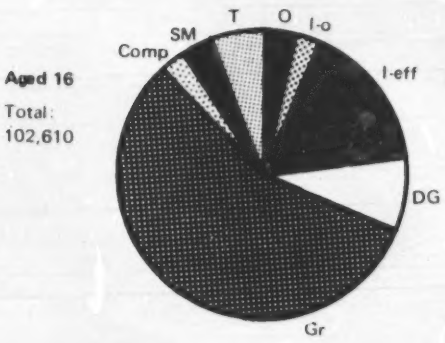
TABLE I

PUPILS IN DIFFERENT TYPES OF SCHOOL—1958 AND 1973; AGED 14 AND 16*
(ENGLAND AND WALES)

* On 1st January



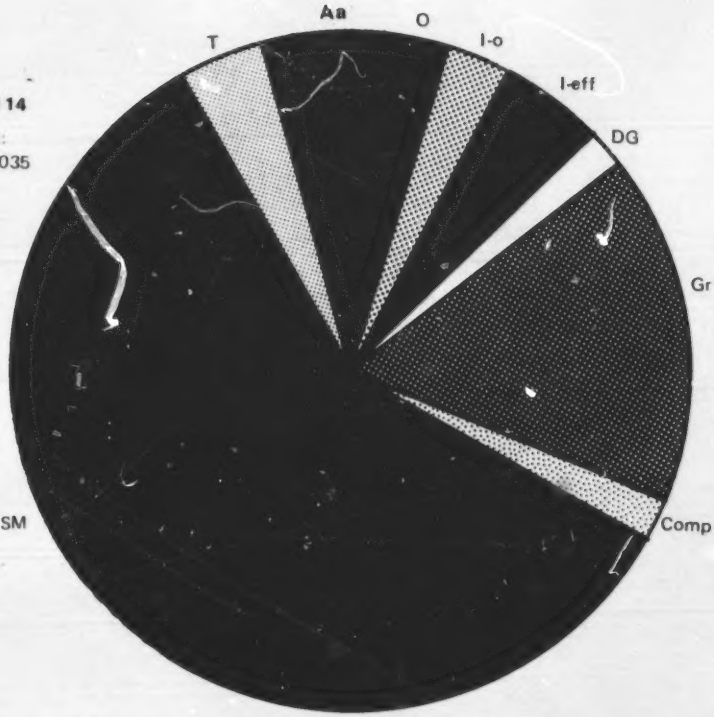
Aged 16

Total:
102,610

1958

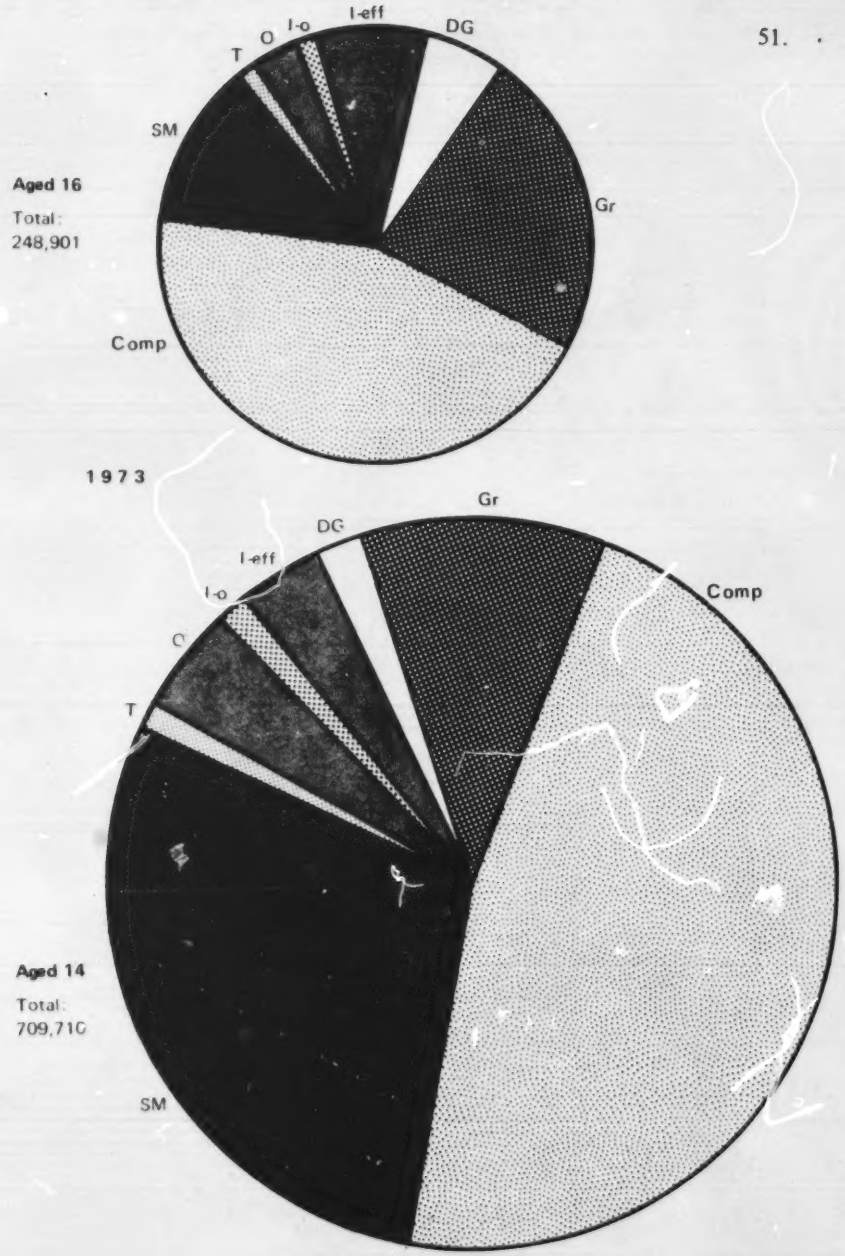
Key to school types:

Aa = all-age schools
Comp = comprehensive
DG = direct grant (gr.)
Gr = grammar (maintained)
I-eff = independent, efficient
I-o = independent, other
O = other
SM = secondary modern
T = technical



Aged 14

Total:
616,035



REPRODUCED FROM "EXAMINATIONS AT 16+ : PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE"
(REPORT OF THE JOINT EXAMINATIONS SUB-COMMITTEE OF SCHOOLS COUNCIL; 1975)

Part of the problem, therefore, relates to the much wider clientele throughout the school. Whereas languages were a normal component of only about $\frac{1}{6}$ of junior pupils, and denied to most of the rest, in the comprehensive system far more pupils (c. 60% to 80%, depending on schools) have the opportunity to study a language; but the spread of ability is very much wider.

The comprehensive school VIth form in the new system (in which more pupils stay on than they did in 1958, and which now outweighs the grammar schools by 2:1 or more) has also changed in character. Here is a summary which, I believe, is not untypical: a description of work in a six-form entry comprehensive in London:

> All pupils start a language (French or German) in 1st year, and (except for remedial cases) continue for a least three years; $\frac{2}{3}$ opt to continue to 5th year. All classes are mixed ability, timetable problems rendering setting impossible. O level can no longer be taught: CSE in German, Joint OL/CSE in French. Classes average thirty. Beginners' courses are shared by IVth and VIth years (staff rationalization). Staff rationalization also means that half the VIth form classes are combined Lower and Upper VI. Sometimes the same group is taught by three different teachers. Most VI form entrants are not academic, and may take only one A level. Since O-level is not done, there is an immense gap between Vth year and VIth year work; mixed-ability teaching can lay little stress on grammar, but concentrates on oral skills, and self-expression without constant correction. Many pupils, including the brighter, tend to choose 'easier' options for A level, and are discouraged by the demands, in regular work and memorization, made in language teaching. Social and home problems (friends who have left school, no home facilities for study, unwillingness to join in after-school activities, exchange visits, or travel abroad) compound the problem. Most A level students are not going to university, and would prefer an all-language examination.
>
> *(From 'The Crisis in Modern Languages in Secondary and Higher Education', Conference at KCL, November 1976)*

The exisiting O and A level examinations were brought into being when, for languages, both O and A levels were targets for grammar-school pupils only. Whatever we think of their merits, they are manifestly unsuited to the situation I have just described. What therefore should be done?

We are concerned today only with the implications of this for the senior school and the school-leaving examinations; but the point needs to be made in passing that questions raised here about the place of languages throughout the school do have a bearing on what can be done at school-leaving level. The ultimate target in

the VIth form must bear some relationship to the starting point at VIth form entry, i.e. what goes on in the first five years. Here is not the place to debate the question of the role of languages in a common core curriculum; I just mention it as having a fundamental bearing on the subject.

2. *Examinations at 18+: the N and F proposals* In his contribution to this symposium, Mr. Hedley quotes the reasons given by the Schools Council for desiring a move away from the A-level structure, and the definition of the N and F proposals intended to provide a solution.
N.B. These are contained on pages 18 and 20 of Mr. Hedley's text.

How were these principles applied in the case of Modern Languages? The Steering Group for Modern Languages (one of sixteen such groups, covering the major syllabus areas, established in 1974 by the Schools Council) began work in early 1975. It drew up a list of the major groups of students who might benefit from the study of a foreign language beyond O level:

1. there were the specialists who would want to look at the subject in depth and for whom it would be the main interest or a valuable ancillary to the main interest in higher education;

2. there were those who would be going into higher education and for whom a modern language would be a useful but not a major expertise;

3. there were students who would be starting a career at the age of 18 and who might need a foreign language for this (e.g. in the sales, marketing, secretarial spheres);

4. there were those who would want to continue the study of a language in the VIth form purely for their own interest or general education or because there would be no other choice of subject for them;

5. a special group was those who would want to start a language in the VIth form and carry it to a good level.

(From Report of the Modern Languages Syllabus Steering Group, Schools Council 18+ Research Programme, April 1977)

The Steering Group then set up four Commissioned Groups to design four syllabuses, two in French and two in German. The four groups were given four different briefs, in order to explore different aspects of the problems involved. These were:

(A) *Cambridge Local Examination:* design a 'strong' F course, in French, possibly involving separate treatment for F students even in the first year. Literature would be expected at F level.

(B) *Midhurst Grammar School:* design a 'strong' N course for French keeping N and F students together even for much time in the second year. F level would involve literature/background, but language work would be in common for N and F, though perhaps graded differently.

(C) *Associated Examining Board:* a unit credit system for German, which would enable students to develop certain skills to a greater and others to a lesser depth (e.g. receptive skills at N level). Some background studies were envisaged at N level.

(D) *Dr. Ann Harding* was asked to form a group to produce a study for beginners N level in German. It was recognized that this would need to be given a defined syllabus content, and could involve developing only certain skills to real depth.

How can the syllabus proposals be summarized? The following inevitably involves an element of distortion, since it draws attention to the final testing, while some syllabuses make their most important contribution in terms of proposals for class work, not reflected in the examination format. Moreover the four outlines are presented in quite different ways, which makes direct comparisons difficult. We shall examine first the three 'standard course' proposals.

TABLE II

N and F: Comparison of proposed course structures
Mark allocation in percentages

	Cambridge: French	*Midhurst: French*	*AEB: German*
1. Listening Comprehension	**Recorded passage:** m/c questions	Recorded passage: questions in English	(a) Recorded passage: m/c questions (b) Recorded passage: ques. in English
	N 15 F 9	N 20 F 15	N 20 F 13
2. Written Comprehension	(a) Summary: 350 words Fr. into 150 Eng. (b) Translate Fr. to Eng. (2 passages) (c) (F only) a third translation passage	(a) Comprehension passage, ques. in English (b) Translate Fr. to Eng.	(a) m/c ques. on text (b) Ques. in English on text (c) (F only) linguistic questions on text
	N a + b 15 F a + b + c 13	N 26 F 20	N a + b 20 F a + b + c 20
3. Oral	(a) Internal: discuss –picture –passage (b) External –conversation on set topic –reading passage –five situations (c) (F only) conversation	(a) reading passage (b) conversation on 10 texts submitted by candidate	Structured interview on topics and material specified by examiner
	N a + b 25 F a + b + c 21	N 26 F 20	N 15 F 13

Table II continued over

	Cambridge: French	*Midhurst: French*	*AEB: German*
4. Written Production	(a) 3 texts or sets of data answers in Fr. on one (b) essay (c) prose (F only)	(a) 2 essays on prescribed themes (b) (F only) *either* more formal essay *or* prose	(a) guided composition on given data (b) linguistic reconstruction (c) essay (F only)
	N: a *or* b — 25 F: 2 of a/b/c — 32	N: a — 26 F: a + b — 30	N: a + b — 15 F: a + b + c — 23
5. Reading Programme	(a) Assessed work on 6 modern texts (b) 2 set texts (chosen from list of 8) (F only)	*either* 2 texts *or* genre or theme *or* historical or social *or* cultural theme (F only)	(a) communication (b) social structures (c) texts (d) advanced social *or* literary study (F only)
	N: a — 20 F: a + b — 25	N: none: see oral — 15 F:	N: a + b + c — 15 F: a + b + c + d — 20
			Assessed assignments (6) in Eng. or Ger.
			N: 15 F: 11

1. General Comments

All the courses are 'end-on', i.e. F level involves the totality of N level plus additional elements; no alternative courses are proposed.

All three studies envisage much wider reading, including texts other than literary (especially Midhurst and AEB).

All explore methods of testing at present in experimental use in one board or another (e.g. multiple choice questions, techniques for examining listening comprehension).

All involve very heavy teaching and private study programmes, in particular on reading; we shall return to this later.

II. Comments on individual skills

1. Listening comprehension: Either multiple-choice or open-ended questions or both. The test is common to N and F in all studies.

2. Written comprehension

Translation from French into English is proposed in Cambridge and in Midhurst, not in AEB.

A comprehension passage is proposed in Midhurst and AEB, the intention being to encourage faster reading with gist-understanding.

Summary is proposed in Cambridge.

The F level 'Linguistic comprehension' test in AEB will be explained later.

Cambridge downgrades receptive skills at F level.

3. Oral

Cambridge proposes extensive test; even then there is limited scope, at F level only, for conversation as such.

Midhurst gives little definition of its oral test; but it involves discussion of a list of texts.

AEB proposes conversation based on newspaper articles, data, maps, provided by the examiner.

4. Written production

Translation into FL is optional in Cambridge and Midhurst (and then only at F level), and is eliminated in AEB.

An essay, usually with guidelines, in all (F level only for AEB).

AEB proposes a linguistic reconstruction test: a passage is given, the candidate is asked to substitute a different word/idiom/structure for selected items.

5. Reading programme

The Midhurst proposal needs explanation: no N level assessment appears as such, and the reading programme as a basis for a discussion at the oral seems inadequate as a test. However, the examples of language course-work given are highly content-based; and the reading requirement is ten texts.

AEB proposes a 'communication' section on the transmission and reception of information, the factual and emotive/imaginative uses of language.

While Cambridge and Midhurst tend to prescribe close study of texts at F level only (Midhurst only as an option), AEB proposes a limited number of texts at N level, with wider reading demanded at F.

III Each scheme in turn

(A) Cambridge The submission really defines only the examination, with notes on each section; there is little reference to a teaching syllabus.

Summary is proposed as an examination technique for comprehension (the argument being that it encourages rapid reading, reading for comprehension).

Composition is based on data (including maps, statistics, texts) provided.

N level assessment of reading (6 texts, all modern) is done by assignments during the course. F level reading (17th–20th century texts) is little defined. Candidates must answer on two texts from a list of eight.

(B) Midhurst The Midhurst proposal stresses comprehension, wide reading, exploitation of multi-media teaching. There is more here on *teaching*.

The course combines detailed analysis of short passages with gist reading of longer texts.

A sample teaching module is given:

resources needed (texts, films, tapes .....)

written work required

a proposed lesson sequence

Here the 'content-motivation' is visible: study of such questions as urbanisation, the relation of France to NATO, agricultural incomes, shanty towns and migrant workers is proposed.

F level complements the reading with *either* two texts studied in depth; *or* a range of historical, biographical, or sociological themes.

The intention to bring so-called 'background' elements to the fore.

(C) AEB The AEB scheme is the most radical of the three; more space is devoted to arguing aims, hence methods, hence tests.

The theme is defined as *reflection on communication*, rather different from the usual 'civilisation' suggestions:

'The focal point of this curriculum will be a study of communication; that is to say, a study of the institutions and forms in which information, ideas and attitudes are transmitted and received; in particular, the process of transmission and reception. This will involve consideration of the manner and style of presentation of information and viewpoint by different newspapers, magazines, by radio and television. An important aspect of this study will be the degree of personal involvement of the writer in the events or issues he is describing, as manifest in the form of language he uses, i.e. the choice of emotive or neutral vocabulary, the emphasis on certain detail, etc. A further area of study will be communication between individuals in their social and personal roles. (For instance, a letter from the Head of a firm to an employee informing him of his selection for a tour abroad to visit overseas contractors, a letter from the Head of Department to the employee giving him details of, say, dates, travel arrangements, expenses, etc.....)' At both N and F level, the confrontation of imaginative and non-fictional language would be integral, though the form of the test would enable an emphasis to be placed on one or the other aspect.

The 'linguistic comprehension' test suggested at F level involves the identification of emotive or factual uses of language.

AEB was asked to explore the possibility of arranging the examination as a series of units, which would enable 'part-certification', e.g. in the receptive skills, without taking the whole examination.

The 'linguistic reconstruction' test deserves further comment: if translation into the foreign language is a test of precise handling of language in specified situations, then Cambridge and Midhurst are both weak in making it optional without proposing any equally rigorous alternative; AEB proposes such an alternative, giving an example.

On the other hand, AEB requires translation neither from German nor into German.

(D) A word on Dr. Harding's proposal for Beginners' German N level

This course is intended to involve five hours per week in first year VI, and three hours per week in VI^2, giving a total teaching time for the course of some 170 hours. The aim is the understanding of the

spoken and written language; while active skills are used in the teaching process, they are not examined.

The course is seen as 'a sound launching pad for even the more able linguists who may wish to study German at tertiary level' (the argument being that, since receptive skills are learned earlier, and are retained longer, than active skills, the basis will be there on which to build).

No translation is involved.

Concentration is on registers in authentic texts.

The proposal is a carefully argued, programmed presentation of a system of language teaching. This is difficult to summarize briefly, but it involves:

(i) Topics

(a) Listening comprehension

(i) short: announcements
(ii) medium: news bulletins, information questions, instructions; expression of attitudes ('language functions'—hope, gratitude, surprise.....)
(iii) long: discussions, interviews, lectures.

(b) Reading comprehension

(i) short: notices, advertisements
(ii) medium: letters, brochures
(iii) long: papers, articles, books

Within all these topics, the texts are graded for *difficulty*.

(ii) Registers Levels of language are related to various functions on the one hand, to a linguistic syllabus on the other:

Level I: conversational (personal, emotional; many incomplete utterances, 1st and 2nd person forms.....)

informative: factual material, information; language involves simple syntax, passive and impersonal constructions, much lexical variety

narrative: progression within time; language involves complex verb tenses (past), temporal conjunctions, adverbial expressions.

Level II: descriptive: literary or travelogue; language has high lexical variety; complex syntax, relative clauses, prepositional phrases; relatively simple verb structure.

formulaic (instructions, announcements, notices): nominalization, compounds, passives; abstract lexis.

Level III: opiniative: coloured and emotive leader articles, discussion, etc. Language involves hypothetical clauses, subjunctive or conditional, recurring conjunctions, abstract lexis, discourse markers.

(iii) This leads to a *linguistic* (structure, lexis) *definition* (of which only indicators at present exist; much work would need to be done).

(iv) A detailed plan of progression of units is proposed:

1 & 2: basic structures

3: more complex grammar, extended lexis

4 & 5: much self-tuition, working on, and learning from, texts.

(v) *Test* Mainly multiple-choice, and questions in English requiring answers in note form rather than finished prose.

Reading comprehension:	short and medium, m/c, open-ended:	30%
	longer text, questions:	30%
Listening comprehension:	short and medium, m/c, open-ended:	25%
	longer texts, questions:	15%

(Unlimited playback facilities would be allowed here)

The conclusion stresses how much work would need to be done in elaboration of such a course:

linguistic research on syllabus

composition of a course

inservice training of teachers

listening materials and facilities

examination techniques need development

university courses need adaptation to accommodate these students (NB that ab-initio, or post O level, courses already exist in many universities).

Comments: This is a novel type of course, backed by considerable linguistic research and expertise. Its major problem is in the range of new research, materials, training and facilities it implies. Just one example: sample material for exploitation of recorded dialogue is given, specifically aimed at training in *comprehension:* thus, while students are expected to reply in German to questions posed, the *only* point in the answer is whether the information has been understood, and correct grammar and structures in the answer are *ignored* (a technique to which many language teachers might find adaptation difficult).

3. *Summary on all the N and F course proposals:* All four courses have much of interest in them, and deserve detailed analysis, e.g. in terms of the methodologies involved.

The proposals raise certain *questions:*

(a) in themselves: all involve wide reading of six texts, ten texts and so on: is this possible, with a *reduced* availability of timetable space? The rapid reading envisaged is different from the close study of A level, but still .....

translation not at all in AEB; into the foreign language it is optional only in Cambridge and Midhurst F level. Should there be more attention paid to the *precise* handling of language?

(b) external factors: these centre on *feasibility:*

Concurrently with these studies, an investigation of resource implications of an N and F curriculum and examination structure was undertaken by the Schools Council, the results of which were published (January 1978) as Examinations Bulletin 38. This study (done 'in the abstract', since the subject investigations were not complete) tended to assume five periods per week per subject at N level. Cambridge assumes eight in VI[1], and either six or twelve in VI[2].

The Syllabus Steering Group, in its evaluation and conclusions about the studies, recognizes:

(a) that N level objectives may not be attainable in the time available;

(b) that N level may be unacceptable to universities for specialists (if this is a relevant criterion);

(c) that the objectives cannot be reduced. Therefore more time is necessary for modern languages than is allowed in the five-subject pattern. 'There are therefore grave consequences for minority time or for the five-subject pattern.' (p.16)

A *minority report* from the Steering Group felt that the loss of depth at N level would not be adequately compensated by broadening of the curriculum, since there is no compulsion (in the scheme as a whole) to study more subjects or to select a broader span. 'The dissenting members believe that a system of principal and subsidiary subjects at A level would achieve any advantage that N and F might offer while avoiding many disadvantages. They are convinced that such a scheme could be introduced more smoothly, more gradually and less expensively, without the costly and elaborate studies required for N and F.

4. *The Reception of N and F:* I have not heard much public debate: the Schools Council has tended to discourage people from jumping in at this stage, before the further studies are available, in particular the evaluation of the programme as a whole, promised for midsummer 1978.

Various subject panels from universities have published, through the Standing Conference on University Entrance, responses on the subject; these, especially on physics and maths, have been fairly discouraging (e.g. the demand from Physics that the two F levels would have to be Physics and Maths, with the consequence that the student's curriculum would be even narrower than at present). The French submission to SCUE was, on instruction, drawn up without reference to N and F, and the statement from the Professors of French about what they would like to see at university entrance level has not yet been set alongside the N and F proposals. My *personal* view is that the universities will view N with the utmost suspicion as a university entrance qualification for specialist study (AEB might match up to it), but would be fairly happy with the F level proposals (though not all my colleagues would agree). But in that case what has been gained, since one of the aims was to postpone choice of specialization?

5. *The Future Timetable:* We now have the subject studies, published in November 1977; and the *Resources implications* bulletin, January 1978. 'An overall report on the 18+ programme will be published later in 1978 as Schools Council Working Paper 60, *Examinations at 18+: the N and F studies.* This will be an evaluation of the whole N and F programme by the Joint Examinations Sub-Committee (JESC) of the Council.' The Schools Council Working Paper 60 has been published since this paper was written, and is available from Evans/Methuen Educational.

'The Schools Council will not decide before July 1979 at the earliest whether or not to make a recommendation to the Secretary of State.' Before then, there will have been plenty of time for all this material to be assessed and evaluated.

6. *Conclusion:* The sense of a need for change is strong. The argument for change is based in part (though not wholly) on the new pattern of access to language studies for less able candidates. Hence there is great nervousness that standards will be (further) eroded. To guard against this, the proposed syllabuses are very heavy, perhaps too heavy to be feasible.

What are the options available? One may summarize:

maintain the 'selective' element about modern languages (keeping them out of the core curriculum, but available as an option for the brighter students)?

broaden the clientele (and accept dilution)?

hope that better *motivation* may hold the key? Do these courses, with their civilization element, their stress on multi-media teaching, promise to be more attractive, and therefore produce better results?

It could well be that, at the end of the day, the A level structure survives in England and Wales; but that many of the ideas proposed in these studies are absorbed into A level syllabuses. In Northern Ireland, where the school structure is different, but where many of the problems are those which led to the elaboration of the N and F proposals, it will be interesting to see the future of modern language syllabus planning.

F.M HIGMAN, T.C.D.